

A SERMON

PREACHED IN

TRINITY CHURCH, SAINT JOHN,

MARCH 4, 1849,

BY

THE REV. I. W. D. GRAY, D. D.

RECTOR OF THE PARISH:

ON THE

PROVIDENTIAL RESCUE OF THAT CHURCH

FROM FIRE,

ON THE NIGHT OF THE 26TH FEBRUARY, 1849.

SAINT JOHN, N. B.

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1849.

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THE following Discourse, which was penned without any view to its being printed, is committed to the Press at the earnest request of a number of the Parishioners. The Author in complying with their wishes, does it with the sincere prayer that the House in which their forefathers worshipped, and which GOD has mercifully preserved to them in the hour of imminent peril, may long be a Sanctuary to them and to their children.

Saint John, 5th March, 1849.

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A SERMON.

PSALM XLVIII. 9.

"We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy Temple."

HE who proposes to speak of the "loving-kindness" of GOD, has a vast subject before him. To treat of it in general terms is beneath its dignity; to enter into its details, seems to be an endless undertaking. Yet of that "loving-kindness," we ought perpetually both to think, and speak, for it is above us, around us, and within us. But if there be one place more than others, where especially we ought to do this, it is in God's Temple, where with peculiar clearness HE displays it to us, and enriches our souls with its communications. And have we not an imperative call to remember that loving-kindness in this place, to night, where we have so lately experienced the goodness of GOD, in the preservation of the very Temple in which we are now assembled? Surely the recollections of the past week point out to us emphatically our duty this evening, viz. to take up the holy Psalmist's words, and say, while both in Providence and Grace, we trace the evidences of divine mercy, "We have thought of thy loving-kindness O GOD, in the midst of thy Temple."

This Psalm appears to have been composed upon some joyous occasion, when a great deliverance had been effected for Jerusalem. But it looked beyond the literal Zion, and was designed, no doubt, to celebrate the glories of the Gospel Church. It foretels that the Church would be "beautiful for situation," being the site which God had

chosen, the mountain of his holiness; the joy of the whole earth. It predicts the security of the Church, inasmuch as God is well known in her palaces as a sure refuge, and has promised to establish her forever. Hence whatever enemies may combine against her, or whatever dangers befall her, her faithful sons need never tremble, for the gates of hell shall never prevail against her. It is their privilege to "walk about Zion, and tell the towers thereof, to mark her bulwarks, and consider her palaces," to say of Him who reigns therein, "this God is our God, for ever and ever," and while they rejoice in the security which his presence affords, to dwell upon and celebrate the innumerable proofs of his loving-kindness.

And to what point of the universe can we turn without tracing the evidences of this? Shall we raise our eyes to the azure vault of Heaven, where the sun rolls onward in his brightness, where the moon walks in her beauty, and the stars reflect upon unnumbered worlds their distant radiance? Shall we turn in silent contemplation to the world we inhabit, and trace its varied arrangements in the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms? Shall we pause over the wonderful mechanism of our own material frames, or the still more astonishing powers of the human mind? At every step we shall be compelled to mark the beneficence of God, and to exclaim with one who was taught by His own unerring Spirit, "The earth is full of the goodness of the Lord."

Yet these are but a part of His ways. Turn we to the dealings of God, as they are displayed in the arrangements of Providence—even those arrangements by which its ordinary blessings are dispensed to us, and what a field for admiration and praise here opens before us! Whence is it we derive the most common comforts of life? our health, our support, our friends, in a word, every blessing connected with the present world? Are not all to be traced up to the "loving-kindness" of that beneficent Being "from whom cometh every *good* and perfect gift?" Shall we doubt this

truth, because we do not visibly discern the hand that supplies them? Shall we forget it, because they are matters of every day's recurrence? Shall the very fact that ought to melt our hearts under the unceasing exercise of divine benevolence, be suffered to render them callous and unfeeling? Still, as if to meet even this pernicious tendency in our corrupt hearts, there is another provision made in what we are wont to term the extraordinary events of Providence. There are our rescues in the seasons of imminent peril, our preservations from impending calamities, our exemptions from visitations which desolate other homes, and fill with sadness the hearts of those who seemed to need them far less than ourselves! Is there one here to-night who has reached to years of maturity who cannot look back upon his past life, and trace in it some signal proof of divine interposition in his behalf? some evidence of the special providence of God displayed in such a way, as to compel him to recognise His agency? some token of sparing mercy so plain, so palpable, so visibly stamped with the seal of heaven, as almost to extort from his lips the exclamation, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies?" It is true that these extraordinary interpositions of heaven are only extraordinary to *us*; they are in reality, but the continuation of that constant exercise of a beneficent Providence, by which we live, move, and have our being. It is the same power exerted for the same object, only in the *manner* of its exertion rendered the more palpable to us. Yet in the very fact that it is *thus* exerted, that the manner arrests our attention, that the power is seen, that the appeal is felt, we have a fresh summons to meditate upon the goodness of God. Surely it is this view of the subject which David indicates in the 107th Psalm, where, after enumerating the various interpositions of Providence in behalf of the Traveller, the Captive, the Sick, the Mariner,

and at every successive allusion, calling upon men to praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men, he closes this catalogue of mercies with these emphatic words, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

Nor must we pass unnoticed, that proof of the superintending Providence of God, to which the Psalm before us more especially refers—the special Providence exerted in all ages in behalf of His Church. In the Antediluvian world, the faithful were few in number, but some there ever were who "walked with God." In the Ark, God's Church was reduced to eight souls, but all the waters of the sea and clouds could not overwhelm it. In Egypt it was subjected to cruel bondage, but while the bush burned with fire, God was in the midst of it; then it passed through the perils of the desert, but the pillar and the cloud conducted it; then in the promised land, through the perils of idolatrous influence, but there were seven thousand still who had not bowed the knee to Baal; then in Babylon, the Virgin Daughter of Zion sat mourning in the dust, but the Lord made bare His arm in the sight of all nations: He raised up a Cyrus to loose the bands from her neck, to bid her arise from the dust, and put on her beautiful garments. Then her sons became apostate, and crucified the Lord of Glory—their city and their temple were levelled with the ground, and they, as a nation, were scattered to the winds of heaven. Still the Church survived; there was a "remnant according to the election of grace." Then in the three first centuries, she passed through ten persecutions, but "the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the Church;" and even while that blood was flowing, the temples of Paganism and all their costly machinery were crumbling into ruins before the cross of Christ. Then came the Man of Sin in the West, and the Mahometan Impostor in the East; the one with the sword, the other with heretical poison; but the Church still lived. She sought indeed the

wilderness as her retreat ; her sons " of whom the world was not worthy, wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth ;" but the clear atmosphere of Truth sustained her, during centuries of trial, and when at length the darkness increased, and the case seemed almost hopeless, then " man's extremity became God's opportunity," and the bright light of the Reformation burst forth, and cast its heavenly illumination far and wide. And since that glorious era, the powers of darkness have struggled hard to mar the work of our Reformers, and to bring back upon us, from time to time, the errors of a darker age ; but what avails it ? The force of truth prevails. The Church of God remains. She is strengthening her stakes, and lengthening her cords, and sending her messengers afar, and the distant hills are catching the beams of her truth, and the watchmen are lifting up their voices to hail them in strains of triumph—" how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth !"

But the most glorious exercise of loving-kindness, remains to be considered. It is to be traced, not in the works of nature, beautiful, attractive, and beneficent as they are ; not in the dealings of providence, unceasingly as they administer to our comfort ; but in the work of redemption, where we behold " mercy and truth meeting together, righteousness and peace embracing each other." But how shall we survey this work ? In what aspect shall I present it to your view ? Shall I point you to the Father's love, in sacrificing for our souls the dearest object of heaven ? Shall I remind you, that " God spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all ?" that " herein was love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins ?" Shall I recall to your thoughts our own wretched condition, that " we were foolish, disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another ; but after that the kindness

and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour?" Shall I refer you to the sufferings of your Redeemer? Who can enumerate them? Who can describe the tortures of His body? Who can comprehend the unknown agonies of His soul? Who can tell what He endured when the Lord had laid on Him the iniquities of us all? Shall we attempt to weigh the *results* of that travail? Who, while we see through a glass darkly, can estimate these? Who can tell what it will be to enter the world of bliss, to put off the robes of mortality, to wear the garments of light, to have fellowship with the company of the redeemed, and with those who never needed redemption, and with Him who reigns in those blessed realms, our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer? No doubt these things surpass our present conceptions: "it doth not yet appear what we shall be;" it hath "not entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has prepared for them that love Him;" and whether we look at the source, the means, or the result of the great work of redemption, at every step we are compelled to say, "the love of Christ passeth knowledge."

But there is one delightful view of the subject that is level to our apprehensions, and through the medium of which we can read in characters sufficiently legible, the loving-kindness of our God. In Christ we behold the Father. In Jesus, veiling himself in human flesh, passing through the chequered scenes of mortal existence, encountering grief, and shame, and suffering, and death; we see the "brightness of the Father's glory," the perfections of the Infinite God. When therefore, from the lips of Jesus, you hear the accents of mercy, inviting the weary to come to Him, saying to the humble suppliant "thy sins be forgiven thee;" when you behold Him ministering to the wants of humanity, healing the sick, comforting the mourner, raising the dead,

weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, bursting into tears over Jerusalem, or praying for his murderers upon the cross, remember you are tracing the character of the Father in the acts of the Son. You are viewing infinite perfection, discovering its beauty through the medium of a finite nature. You are beholding God "manifest in the flesh." You are contemplating the "loving-kindness" of the Lord."

But after all, as in Providence so in Grace, if we would sensibly feel the goodness of the Lord, we must contemplate, not merely the Divine character abstractedly, nor even the work of Redemption, considered in itself, but our connexion with that character, our own interest in that work. The subject is one which can never be rightly estimated by the mere formalist in religion. It is the work of the Spirit in illuminating the mind, renewing the heart, and filling the soul with holy joy, that gives us just conceptions of the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of the love of Christ. It is the having in our souls the Spirit of adoption, the foretaste of heaven, the present sense of pardon, and the assured hope of future glory, and perceiving in our own experience the comfort which these things afford in the day of trial; that alone can enable us to say with any thing of the holy Psalmist's feelings, "We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy Temple."

But why think of it in the Temple more than in any other place? Are not the proofs of the Divine goodness diffused throughout the universe? Does not the christian recognize them in every possible situation? Is not the whole world, as exhibited to the eye of faith, but a Temple of God; and whether he worships in the sanctuary, or makes his bed in the desert, with the heaven for his canopy and the stone for his pillow, is he not privileged to say, "Surely the Lord is in this place, this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven?"

All this is true. The christian knows it to be so. He knows that in the wide world there is no imaginable situa-

tion in which while his mind is sound, and his faith in exercise, he cannot discern "the loving-kindness" of his God. Still there are reasons, and strong ones too, why it is more especially both his duty and his privilege to think of that loving-kindness in the midst of the Temple.

One is, because *there he hears of it*. It is there especially that the love of God in Christ is unfolded to his view; there he is invited to taste and see how gracious the Lord is; there he learns that the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer, that when they cry, the Lord heareth them, and delivereth them out of all their troubles; that the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and will save such as be of a humble spirit; in a word, that "though great are the troubles of the righteous, the Lord delivereth him out of all."

Another reason is, because it is there especially he *seeks* the loving-kindness of God. This is our great object in coming to God's Temple. We come to hold communion with our Maker, and to taste the blessings of that communion. It is not merely to perform certain acts, as a matter of *duty*, but to seek God, His favor, His grace, His consolations, His support, and constant guidance, through the perplexities of this dark world. We come to pray for an interest in His loving-kindness; to place ourselves beneath the protection of His providence, to share in the blessings of His covenant of grace; in a word, to be strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, and to be filled with all the fulness of God. Now God's Temple affords us an appropriate place for doing this. We can do it individually in our closets, and socially in our families, but not *collectively*, as a congregation, save in the Temple of God.

And this suggests a further reason why we should think of God's goodness in the midst of His Temple, viz., because there especially we *realize* it. Why does the holy Psalmist exclaim with fervour, "O God thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; to see thy power

and thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the Sanctuary?" He answers the question, "Because thy loving-kindness is better than life." It is, in the Temple of God, especially that we become experimentally acquainted with that loving-kindness. Here we have access to those blessed ordinances, which are designed to be means of grace to those who rightly use them. Here the gracious promise is fulfilled that wherever two or three are gathered together in the name of Christ, there He is in the midst of them. Here the careless are awakened, the ignorant directed into the narrow path, the mourner comforted with the consolations of Christ, and the established believer edified and animated in his difficult warfare. There is many a mind perplexed with passing events, many a heart that would sink overwhelmed by the sorrows of life, were it not for the strength imparted from above, within God's Temple; many a soul that has said with David, "When I thought to know this, it was too hard for me, until I went into the Sanctuary of God; then understood I the end of these men." My Brethren! if there be any of us, who within the limits of God's house have been brought to know our Saviour, if we have realized here a sense of his pardon; if we have felt our minds relieved from perplexity, our hearts comforted under affliction, strengthened for duty; in a word, if we have felt it good to be here, because while contemplating the wondrous works which the Lord our God has wrought for us, we have had given to us, either faith in His promises, or resignation to His will, or love to His commands, then have we realized within His Temple, the loving-kindness of the Lord.

For all these reasons then, let us think of that loving-kindness in the midst of His Temple, and let the recollections of the past week tend to deepen our impressions of gratitude, while we reflect upon that merciful Providence by which our Sanctuary has been preserved to us—a preservation enhanced by the very thought that it was effected through the ardent zeal, untiring energy, and undaunted courage of those who

revered it as the Sanctuary of God. Had not God put it into their hearts thus to act, how different would have been our position on this consecrated day! In the language of the Prophet we should have had to exclaim, "Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised Thee, is burnt up with fire, and all our pleasant things are laid waste." The loss would have been severe, in the present circumstances of our community; and to many, the trial of feeling would have been more than the loss of money. Another building you might have had, but not the building where your fathers had worshipped; another structure, more stately perhaps, more spacious, and more ornamented, but not the structure which reared its head amid the trees of the forest, and first invited the loyal sons of the infant Colony to worship within its walls. No doubt there are hearts here this evening, to which these recollections are dear; aye, dearer far than the pillars and the dome, and the turrets of the most splendid edifice that could have occupied the place where OLD TRINITY CHURCH had stood. As then, your ordinances, and the blessings which attend them, and your holy House where your fathers have worshipped, are still preserved to you, lift up your hands in the Sanctuary and bless the Lord; yea, say with the Psalmist, "We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy Temple!"

But lastly. While we think of the loving-kindness of our God, let us not forget the duties that devolve upon ourselves. We have admired the love of Christ, but let that love constrain us to live to Him who died for us! We have lauded the zeal of those who laboured to preserve our Sanctuary—let us remember that it behoves all of us to labour that we may enter into the rest of God. We have all a work to perform—an arduous and difficult work. We have to work out our own salvation; we have to work for the honour of God. Let us be zealous in this work; zealous to accomplish it *at all hazards*; zealous to accomplish it in *due time*.—While the flames encompassed the Tower of our Church,

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and all was hurry, confusion, and alarm around it, I was arrested by a trivial, but as it seemed at the moment, a significant occurrence. The clock, almost enveloped in fire, struck the hour; as if to say, time is passing, what thou doest, do it with all thy might. O let us remember this, while we are working for eternity. Time is passing from all of us; and we are passing from time. In a little space the clock will have struck the hour that marks our transition to an invisible world: the interval is short; work then, while it is called to-day; the night cometh when no man can work.

And here I am reminded that one aged member of this congregation, who was here at service last Sunday, and during the interval between the services spent the whole time upon her knees in her pew, a highly respected and useful inhabitant of this community, and as we have reason to think from a long and consistent life, a sincere believer in Christ, is now in eternity. To her, I doubt not, the change is a happy one. Her work was done. The hour came. The clock struck. She was ready. She went to her reward. My Christian Brethren! Look upwards to your home. Set your affections there. Be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. The night cometh when no man can work; but the day also cometh when your work will be done. Then you will quit the earthly Sanctuary to take your station in the heavenly one: you will leave the material, to occupy the spiritual Temple. That Temple, blessed be God, stands secure upon Mount Zion. No flames will ever deface its towers; no dangers befall its friends; no night will darken its skies; no member be removed from its Sanctuary. Beneath the canopy of the empyreal heavens, it will shine in everlasting light, reflecting the glory of the Sun of righteousness upon all its happy worshippers, who forever and forever, with increasing joy, will sing, "We have thought of thy loving-kindness, O God, in the midst of thy Temple."

AMEN.